

CHRONOLOGICAL HISTORY OF THE TRAIL SYSTEM

This chronological history of the trail system was extracted primarily from the Cultural Landscape Plan, Volumes I and II (May 2002), the Valley Forge Administrative History (September 1984), and from selected maps and reports held in the park archives. This list details the changes to the circulation systems within the park, with an emphasis on trails included in the assessment. A brief history of each trail is included with the individual trail assessments in Chapter V. A few historic maps from the park's archives are included in this report to illustrate modifications to the trail system. A thorough study of materials in the park archives would yield much more information about the construction and maintenance of the trail system.¹

Native Americans (pre 8,000 BP to 1600s)

8,000 BP to 1600s - Archeological investigations within the park have located sites of Native American occupation, which indicate use of the river terraces and floodplain, as well as the upland flats, hilltops and hillslopes during the Paleo-Indian (pre 8,000 BP), Archaic (8,000 BP to 2,800 BP), and Woodland (2,800 BP – 650 BP) periods.² Knowledge is limited of Native American settlement patterns and site functions in the Lower Schuylkill region. Natives indigenous to southeastern Pennsylvania were called the Lenape or “original people.” Although it is likely that Native Americans established and used trails, particularly along the river, none have been identified within the park. Several prehistoric sites are within the present park in close proximity to current trails.

Early European Settlement period (1630 – 1777)

Post 1660s - By the 1660s European settlements displaced most of the Lenapes in the region.

1600s - With the arrival of European settlers in the 1600s, farmsteads were established in the valley south of the Schuylkill River and the fertile plains or “fatland” north of the river. A network of cart roads and worm and post-and-rail fences delineated parcels. Market farms harvested grains and timber, which were brought by river or cart road to Philadelphia for export.³

1725 - Nutt's Road constructed, also known as the Great Road or 1725 Road, (now Route 23). The road lead between Philadelphia and iron works located along French Creek run by the Nutt family. The road included a ford across Valley Creek.⁴

1725-1761 - Gulph Road (1725) and the road to Jenkins Mill were surveyed and established.⁵

1736 - A petition was filed to construct a road across the Schuylkill River at the Fatland Ford site, referred to as the “usual ford.”⁶ It was also referred to as “The Baptist Road,” when designated as a public road in 1736.

1740s - Valley Forge was named for the iron forges on Valley Creek. The steep-sided walls of the valley coupled with the rapid flow of water were ideal for sawmills, gristmills, and forges. Iron ore mined from French Creek was brought down Nutt's Road to the forge, then products were shipped to Philadelphia.⁷ Some marked trails radiating from Valley Creek lead to the sites of former collier huts and follow early logging roads. Colliers harvested timber, transported it to charcoal hearths throughout the woods, and then to the iron forge. Mount Misery and Horseshoe trails travel along former logging roads and pass by charcoal hearths, though little primary documentation has been found on these road traces.⁸

1743 - Crux Road and logging trails on Mount Joy established along Valley Creek. Crux Road (now the northern-most section of Route 252) connected the features of the forge with the Great Road.⁹

1750 ca. - A ferry crossing of the Schuylkill River was established and maintained by the Pawling family.¹⁰

1751-1761 - A petition was filed for a road leading between Mount Joy Forge and Swedes Ford. The road was laid out within a decade of the petition, and was later named the Port Kennedy Road.¹¹

1753 - The Pawlings family filed a petition to establish a road along the current alignment of Pawling Road. The road was intended to travel from the "waters edge to the road leading from the Iron Works on French Creek to the City of Philadelphia."¹²

1768 - A petition to establish a road between Baptist Road and Yellow Springs was filed in Chester County. Once built, the road passed property owned by John Potts, Isaac Davis, David John, Samuel Havard, William Currie, Samuel Davis, and along Valley Creek.¹³

American Revolution Encampment Period (1777-1778)

1777-1778 - During the encampment period existing local roads and the river remained important transportation routes for military personnel, supplies and equipment, (Figure 2.1). The region's hard-packed earth roads were often difficult to navigate during the encampment period because of conditions: they were muddy when wet and crusty when frozen. The Continental Army appears to have established a few secondary roads, including a route paralleling the Outer Line entrenchments and other access routes to the fortifications, but otherwise depended on many of the existing routes for transportation by horse.¹⁴

Post Encampment and Early Commemorative Period (1778 – 1893)

1800s - After the encampment, farming activities resumed and twenty-four separate parcels of land made up what would become the national park area. Most parcels were in agricultural use, though a few owners quarried limestone on their land. William Dewees, Jr. and David Potts rebuilt the iron forge at Valley Creek, but subsequently sold the property and the forge ceased operation.

1800s - Trails and associated structures appeared in association with industrial activities include: portions of the Chapel Trail, Quarry Road trace, Quarry/kiln access trace, trace road to Colonial Springs Bottling Plant and industrial ruins at the Colonial Springs, along Valley Creek, and the banks of the Schuylkill River.

1800s - Canal and rail construction in the 1800s left behind traces of quarries, stone tunnels, walls, railroad beds, canal dams, locks, towpaths, and related building ruins.¹⁵

1810 - A toll bridge was constructed across the Schuylkill River near the site of Pawling's ferry, replacing it and the use of an existing ford. The structure was later destroyed by flood but was rebuilt in 1820.¹⁶

1824 - The Schuylkill Navigation Company (created in 1815) establishes commercial canal facilities along the Schuylkill River between Reading and Philadelphia. The canal provided an important connection, via junction with Union Canal in Berks County, between the Susquehanna River and Philadelphia. The company constructed a towpath, lock and dam on the Wetherill and Pawling properties.¹⁷

1828 - Organizers of the fiftieth anniversary celebration of the encampment initiated the tradition of combining recreation with commemoration. Several years later the first commemorative markers and monuments were installed.

1835 - The Philadelphia and Reading Railroad purchased land along the Schuylkill as a right-of-way for a rail line.¹⁸

1840s - Two stone markers were placed at the site of Sullivan's bridge. An observatory tower was built on the summit of Mount Joy. Neither is extant but the River and South River Trails lead past the sites of the bridge markers. Mount Joy trails G, H, and I lead to the observatory site, where another observatory tower (since demolished) was built in the early twentieth century.

1842 - The Philadelphia and Reading Railroad initiated rail service between Philadelphia and Reading, Pennsylvania. A small train station was established near Washington's Headquarters and also at Port Kennedy.¹⁹

1846 - The Schuylkill Navigation Company expanded canal operation on the river, enlarging the dam and lock near Pawling's Ford, and relocating the towpath to the southern bank of the river.²⁰

1848 - Construction of a toll bridge across the Schuylkill River between Port Kennedy and Betzwood was authorized. Once completed, the bridge was a covered wooden structure, wide enough for two wagons to pass, with a toll house at one end.²¹

1852 - A wooden bridge was constructed to provide a Valley Creek crossing for the extension of Crux Road (Valley Creek Road) leading to the realigned Yellow Springs Road.²²

1859 - The Port Kennedy Railroad Company was chartered to construct a freight rail line spur from the Reading tracks and wharf area, past the furnace, to various lime quarrying and processing sites along what is now county line road.²³

1865 - A new wooden covered bridge was constructed across Valley Creek to replace the 1852 structure, which was washed away during a flood. The new bridge had a Burr truss design.²⁴

1880s - On the north side of the river, the Pennsylvania and Schuylkill Valley Railroad (later Penn Central Railroad) began operating in 1884. This is now part of the R.O.W. Schuylkill River Trail (bike/hike).

1886 - The Wilson Bridge, an iron structure, was built across Valley Creek near the traditional site of Lafayette's Quarters. The bridge superstructure may have been fashioned by the Phoenix Bridge Company in Phoenixville.²⁵

1890 – A panoramic view of Valley Forge Village was commissioned by Moyer that depicted Mount Misery and Mount Joy in the background, (Figure 2.2).

Valley Forge State Park and Late Commemorative Period (1893 – 1976)

1890's - Valley Forge State Park (hereafter referred to as VFSP) was created. The Valley Forge Park Commission focused on site improvements. The Commission acquired the majority of the land where Washington's troops encamped, created a road system to link historic sites, constructed visitor facilities and programs, erected monuments, maintained encampment era features, and demolished post-encampment structures (Figure 2.3).²⁶

1894 - The Park Commission proposed the "making of such roads and paths as would make the entrenchment's and redoubts possible," including the construction of a "broad avenue or drive way along the whole outer line" along which "nine of the fourteen brigades" had been encamped at Valley Forge. This proposed road would "effectually mark the outer line and also afford an opportunity for the Colonial States to permanently mark the camps of their several troops."²⁷

1900 - Horseshoe Trail South Spring Structure was built.²⁸

1901 - An iron bridge was commissioned to replace the covered wooden structure across the river to Betzwood.²⁹

1905 - Restoration, reconstruction and enclosure of redoubts #3 and #4. Observation platforms and paths were constructed to facilitate the viewing of earthworks.³⁰

1905 - Using a 1905 appropriation, improvements were made to the landscape to better meet visitor needs. Pathways to some of the better preserved entrenchments located on Mount Joy were laid out.³¹

1906 - Park roads completed from Redoubt #4 to Washington's Headquarters and from redoubt #3 to Port Kennedy.³²

1906 - Beginning in 1906, granite markers with bronze tablets were placed at the location of brigades during the encampment. The markers began to meet a growing need for signage to explain those preserved encampment era features made available to the park visitor via new roadways and paths.³³

1907 - Observatory on Mount Joy constructed (75' in height).³⁴

1908 - A road was extended from the main drive to the Mount Joy observatory, along with a pedestrian path and stone steps that also extended from the Washington redoubt to the observatory. The road and path were designed by Jacob O. Clark, a landscape architect (Figures 2.4 and 2.5).³⁵

1909 - By 1909 the roads and paths had been macadamized. Paths for horseback riders and pedestrians were also built through the woods near Fort Washington and connected the area to Washington's Headquarters and the Philander Knox estate. The path from the observatory to Washington's Headquarters and the path from Washington's Headquarters to the hospital were also rebuilt.³⁶

1909 - A bridle path was completed from Redoubt #3, around the observatory, to the main drive at Knox's point.³⁷

1909 - Paths for horses and pedestrians were constructed through woods on Mount Joy.³⁸

1911 - A road around the Wayne Statue was constructed.³⁹

1917 - Views were cleared to Wayne Statue from north, to Valley Creek, to Redoubt #4 from Redoubt #3, and from the observation tower to the southwest and northwest.⁴⁰

1917 - Extensive plans were made for the development of new roads and trails throughout the enlarged park. Road alignment of Arch was changed.⁴¹

1917 - Nine miles of improved roads, one mile of dirt roads and two miles of paths were repaired.⁴²

1926 - A large parking lot was proposed by the base of the observation tower, which included a proposal for a new trailhead for Mount Joy Trail H (Figure 2.3).

1935 - Renovations were made to the walk at the Daughters of the Revolution Monument according to designs by Thomas Sears, a well known landscape architect from Philadelphia.⁴³

1939 - Additional parking was added along the "Camp Road" to serve Dogwood Grove. Quarry Road was macadamized.⁴⁴

1941 - The Keystone Automobile Club cosponsored the first Dogwood Celebration. The park also planted wildflowers along the trails and bridle paths in Wayne's Woods and along Valley Creek in the vicinity of Washington's Headquarters. These were planted to complement the groves of rhododendron, mountain laurel, and wild azalea growing on the slopes of Mount Joy and Mount Misery.

1942-1982 - The Schuylkill River Trail, now called the River Trail, was established between a parking area near Meadow Grove and the Betzwood picnic area. The pedestrian route was later designated a National Recreation Trail.⁴⁵

1950s and 1960s - In the 1950s and 1960s funding to VFSP was limited. The establishment of a trail system, maintenance of park buildings, continued operation of service to meet visitors needs, and a reforestation program represented the major expenditures.⁴⁶

1955 - Vistas on Mount Joy were cut to permit partial panoramic views of the park.⁴⁷

1960 - The covered wooden bridge across Valley Creek was rebuilt after a 1958 fire. The newly-formed Theodore Burr Covered Bridge Society directed the restoration conducted by the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation.⁴⁸

1962 - Ten miles of trails were color coded in regard to foot or horseback travel. Some trails were laid out as nature trails with various tree and shrub specimens identified along the path.⁴⁹ A map from 1962 shows the Horseshoe Trail as the Yellow Trail, the Valley Creek Trail as the Red-White-Blue Trail, Mount Joy trails as the Red Trail, the Chapel Trail as the Blue Trail, the Gold Trail through Wayne's Woods, and the Orange Trail along the southern boundary of the park from Thomas and Gulph Roads to the Commissionary Quarters near King of Prussia Road (now the expressway). As a result of this work and with a view to the bicentennial celebrations the park produced a plan that would have further extended the trail network, (Figure 2.6).

1962 - By the fall of 1962 seven recreation trails covering more than ten miles had been developed. According to Superintendent Pyle, it was in the interest of the Park Commission to maintain a happy medium between the historic and recreational use of the park by allowing limited recreation facilities which did not interfere with the park's historic value.⁵⁰

1974 - In preparation for the Bicentennial, Pennsylvania appropriated \$10,000,000 for park improvements including a six-mile bike path along the Inner and Outer Line Drives, (Figure 2.7). The bike path represented the Park Commission's continued interest in promoting recreation and historical uses of the park. The park commission made comments regarding the effect of the trail noting, "it is our desire to return the area to the eighteenth century look as much as possible but since bicycles were not used in that time we have to accept the fact that the trails are going to detract from the eighteenth century look."⁵¹ By 1975 the park had produced a set of drawings including a general plan and specifications, (Figure 2.8 and 2.9).⁵²

1975 - Other trails associated with the Bicentennial included the "Blue Trail" (now called the Chapel Trail), the Red Trail on Mount Joy (Sections A, B, D, F and J), the "Yellow Trail" (portion of the Valley Creek Trail and the Horseshoe Trail), the Gold Trail (now part of Wayne's Woods paths), and Orange Trail along the park's southern boundary. The survey of the park from this period also indicated that the views from the former observatory tower were still present. The two cleared areas on the west side of Mount Joy included views from the trails that crossed the open spaces.⁵³

1975 - The Valley Forge Park Interpretative Association (VFPIA) initiated a bicycle rental program.⁵⁴

1975 - The footbridge was constructed during the late nineteenth century or early twentieth century to connect the properties to the east and west of Valley Creek was reconstructed using the original abutments.⁵⁵

Valley Forge National Historical Park (1976 – present)

1976 - The official transfer of the park occurred on July 4, 1976 during the bicentennial celebration, although the formal establishment of VFNHP was not carried out until November 1982 when a survey had been conducted and the deed of transfer was completed.⁵⁶

1975-1980 ca. - The Mount Joy Observation Tower, which had been constructed in 1906 and was greatly in need of repairs, was removed by the NPS.⁵⁷

Post 1980s - Under NPS management, park staff have maintained the trails with extensive involvement of volunteer groups such as the Horse-Shoe Trail Club, Boy Scouts of America, and corporate-sponsored volunteer events. For example, volunteer groups have installed numerous waterbars on the Mount Misery trails to reduce erosion. Volunteers have also helped obscure closed trails by dragging logs and brush over the trail treadway.

1982 - The park was officially opened in 1982, the same year the NPS issued a General Management Plan. An associated map indicated the authorized trail system at the time, (Figure 3.1).

1982 - The Schuylkill River Trail, now called the River Trail, was revitalized between Pawling's Road and Betzwood.⁵⁸

1982 - The Schuylkill River Trail, now called the River Trail, was designated a National Recreation Trail.⁵⁹

1995 c. - A new bridge was constructed over the Schuylkill River near the original Pawling's Ford.⁶⁰

1990's - The Betzwood Bridge over the Schuylkill River was demolished, eliminating the only in-park connection between the north and south sides of the river.

2002 - The abandoned rail bed of the Pennsylvania and Schuylkill Valley/Penn Central Railroad was converted to a paved, multi-use rail trail and dedicated in 2002 as the Schuylkill River Trail.⁶¹

Endnotes

- ¹ NPS-28, Cultural Resource Management Guideline,” 1997 describes three levels of investigation, exhaustive, thorough, and limited. p18.
- ² Susan Maxman Architects, John Milner Associates, and Oculus. Valley Forge National Historical Park, Contextual Documentation and Cultural Landscape Plan.” National Park Service, May 2002. (hereafter **CLP**) 21, 534.
- ³ CLP, 537-38.
- ⁴ CLP, 26. (LCS)
- ⁵ CLP, 26. (1988 National Register Nomination, Section 7, 22)
- ⁶ CLP, 26. (Kurtz 1988:158)
- ⁷ CLP, 539.
- ⁸ CLP, 560.
- ⁹ CLP, 26. (LCS)
- ¹⁰ CLP, 26. (Rhoads et al. 1984:123)
- ¹¹ CLP, 26. (Stone 1984:92)
- ¹² CLP, 26. (Kurtz 1988:123)
- ¹³ CLP, 26. (1768 road petition)
- ¹⁴ CLP, 442.
- ¹⁵ CLP, 591.
- ¹⁶ CLP, 36. (Kurtz 1988:123)
- ¹⁷ CLP, 36. (Kurtz 1988:28; Sweeney-Justice 1994:6)
- ¹⁸ CLP, 36. (Sweeney-Justice 1994:6)
- ¹⁹ CLP, 36. (Sweeney-Justice 1994:106)
- ²⁰ CLP, 36. (Kurtz 1988:28)
- ²¹ CLP, 36. (Buck 1884:46)
- ²² CLP, 36.
- ²³ CLP, 36. (Sweeney-Justice 1994:13)
- ²⁴ CLP, 37.
- ²⁵ CLP, 37.
- ²⁶ CLP, 698.
- ²⁷ “Report of the Valley Forge Commission, 1894,” in Report of Reports of Valley Forge Park Commission for the Years 1894, 1896, 1900. 6-7.
- ²⁸ CLP, 44. (LCS)
- ²⁹ CLP, 42. (Sweeney-Justice 1994:13)
- ³⁰ Shaun Eyring, Jody Gee, and David Uschold, “Cultural Landscapes Inventory, Valley Forge Landscape, Valley Forge National Historical Park.” National Park Service, 1998, revised 1999 (hereafter **CLI, VFL**), 19. (Also Harlan Unrau, “Valley Forge Administrative History,” National Park Service, 1984:111)
- ³¹ CLP, 83.
- ³² CLP, 45. (Woodside et al. 1907)
- ³³ CLP, 84.
- ³⁴ CLP, 45. (Woodside et al. 1907)
- ³⁵ CLI, VFL, 19. (Unrau 1984:116)
- ³⁶ CLP, 84.
- ³⁷ CLI, VFL, 20. (Unrau 1984:118)
- ³⁸ CLI, VFL, 21. (Unrau 1984:123)
- ³⁹ CLI, VFL, 21. (Unrau 1984:134)
- ⁴⁰ CLI, VFL, 22. (Unrau 1984:146)
- ⁴¹ CLI, VFL, 23. (Unrau 1984:167)
- ⁴² CLI, VFL, 25. (Unrau 1984:237)
- ⁴³ CLI, VFL, 25. (Unrau 1984:258)
- ⁴⁴ CLI, VFL, 25. (Unrau 1984:281)
- ⁴⁵ CLP, 48. (Kurtz 1988:83)
- ⁴⁶ CLP, 89.
- ⁴⁷ CLI, VFL, 25. (Unrau 1984:326)
- ⁴⁸ CLP, 42.

⁴⁹ CLI, VFL, 25. (Unrau 1984:344)

⁵⁰ CLP, 90.

⁵¹ Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, "Project Directive No 1: Foot, Horse and Bicycle Trails and Trailside Exhibits," April 18, 1975, RG2, Valley Forge National Historical Park.

⁵² CLP, 91.

⁵³ CLI, 25. (Unrau 1984:674)

⁵⁴ CLP, 94.

⁵⁵ CLP, 48. (LCS)

⁵⁶ CLP, 93.

⁵⁷ CLP, 95.

⁵⁸ CLP, 48. (Unrau 1984:681)

⁵⁹ CLI, 25. (Unrau 1984:674)

⁶⁰ CLP, 42.

⁶¹ CLI, 25.

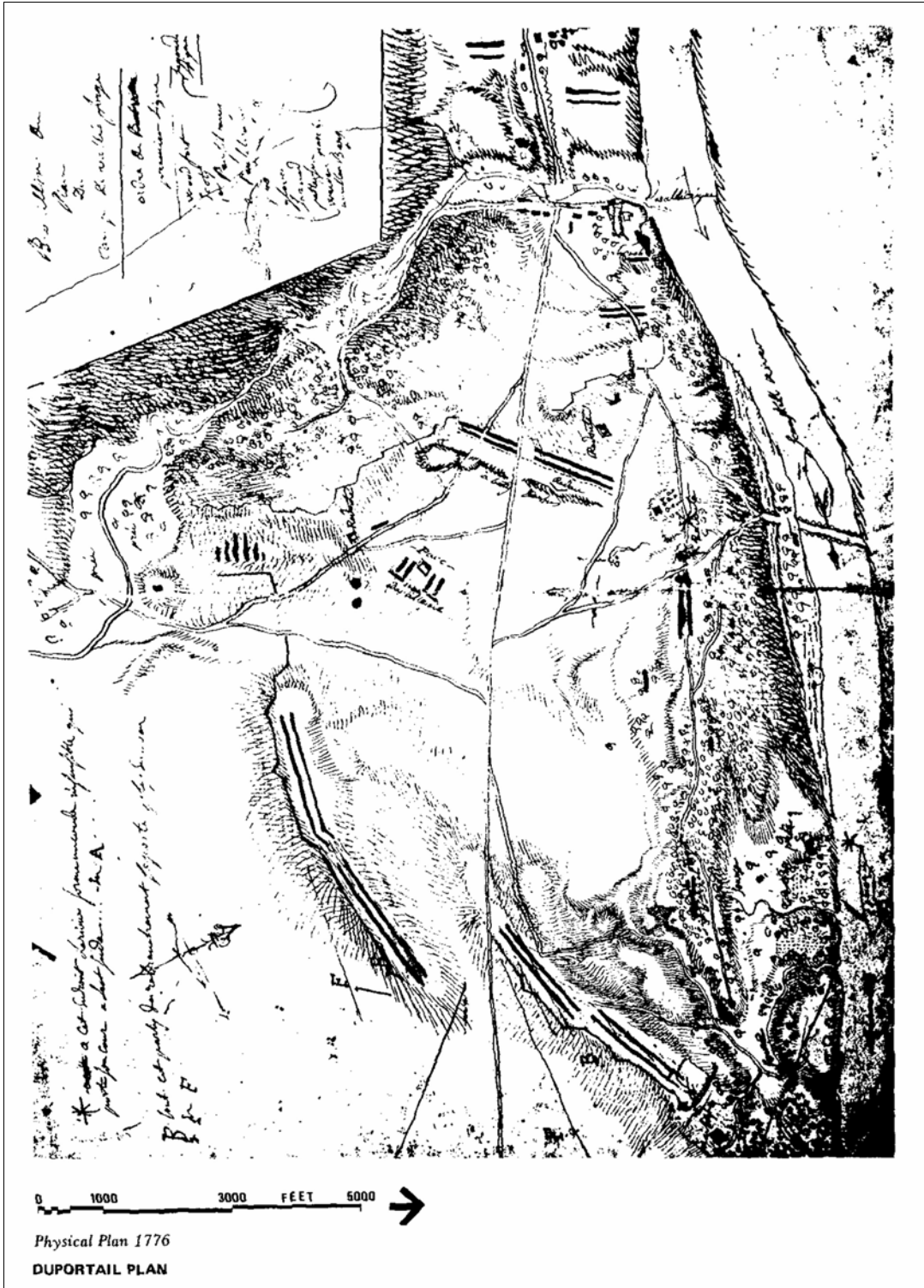


Figure 2.1. *Brouillon et Plan du Camp de Vallee Forge*, c. 1777/8. Brigadier General Louis Lebeque Duportail (original at Map Collection, Historical Society of Pennsylvania; copy on file Valley Forge Park Archives, hereafter VAFO Archives).

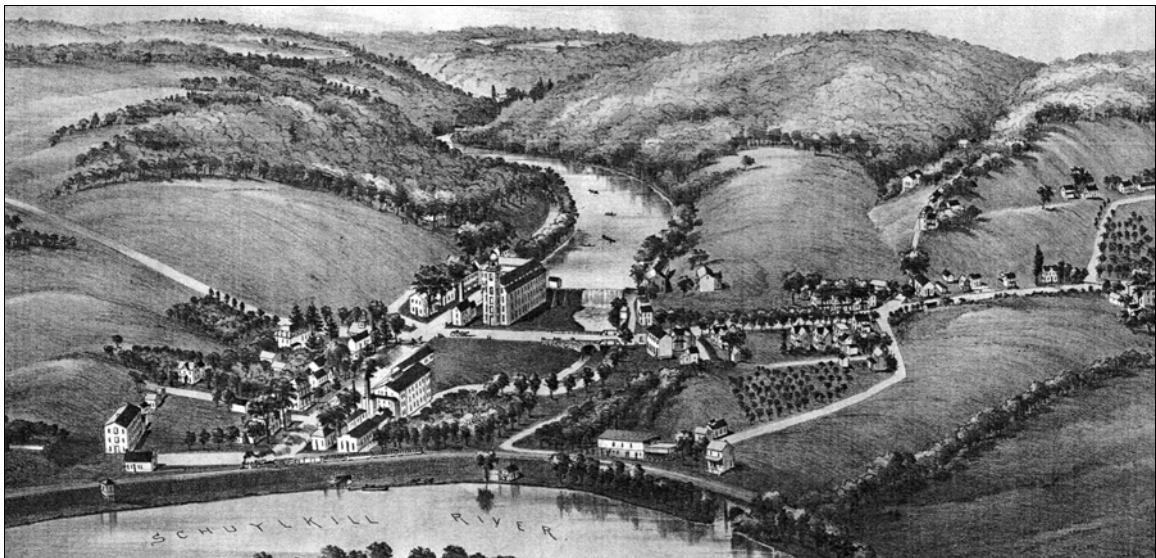


Figure 2.2. Panoramic view of Valley Forge Village commissioned by Moyer in 1890, (Copy on file Valley Forge Park Archives, hereafter VAFO Archives).

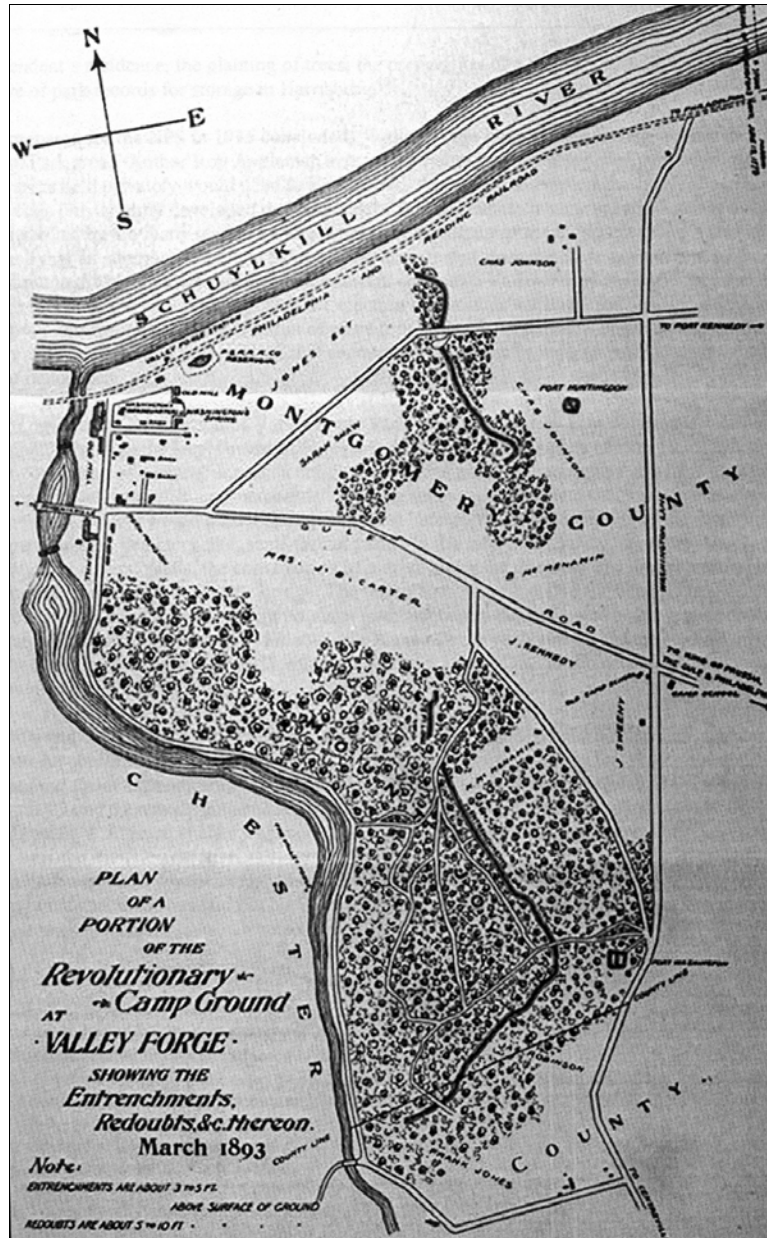


Figure 2.3. Plan of a portion of the Revolutionary Camp Ground at Valley Forge Showing the circulation, entrenchments and redoubts on Mount Joy, March 1893. Francis M. Brooke, 1893. (Copy at VAFO Archives).

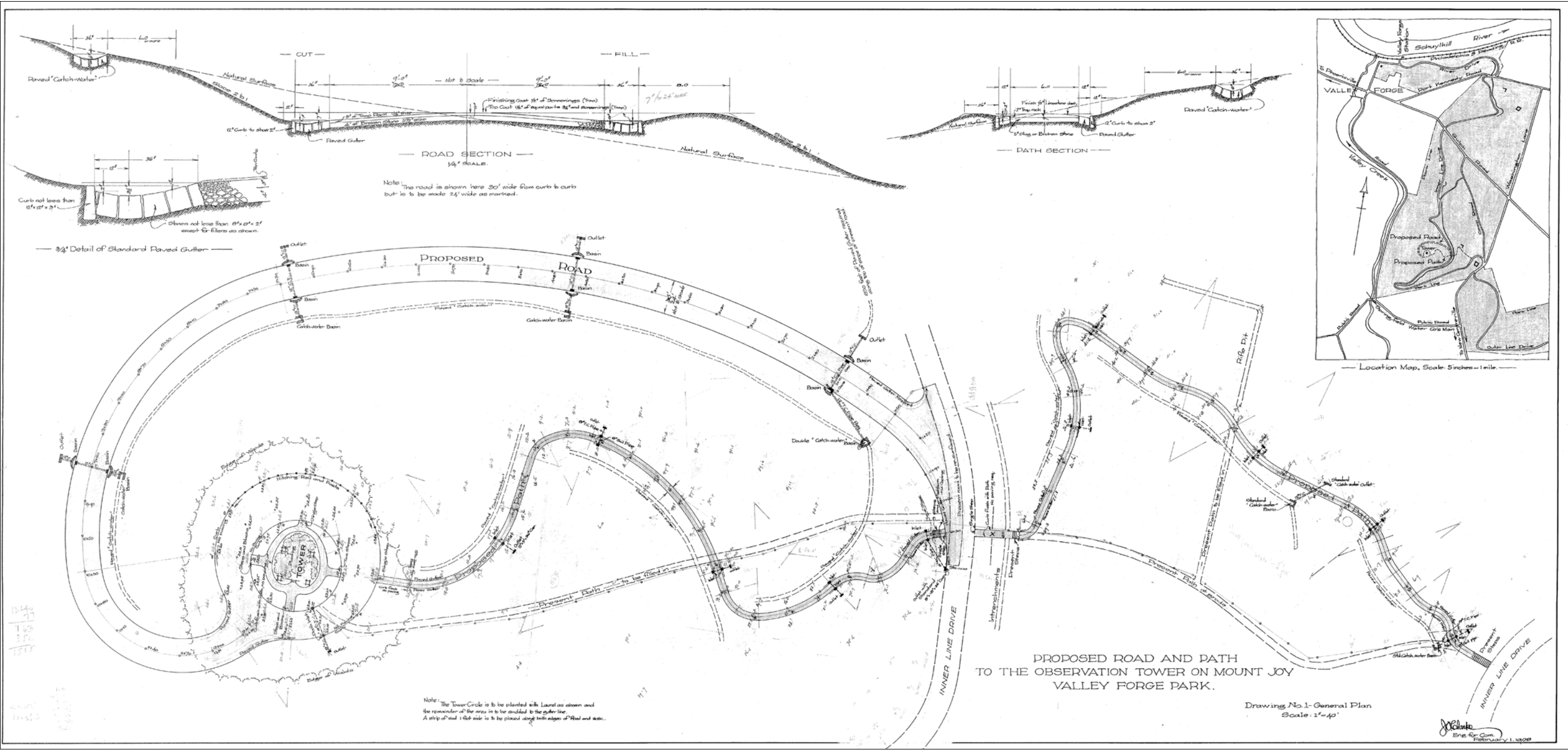


Figure 2.4. Plan showing *Proposed Road and Path to the Observation Tower on Mount Joy*, Drawing No. 1, General Plan. Drawn by J. O. Clarke, February 1, 1908 (VAFO Archives).

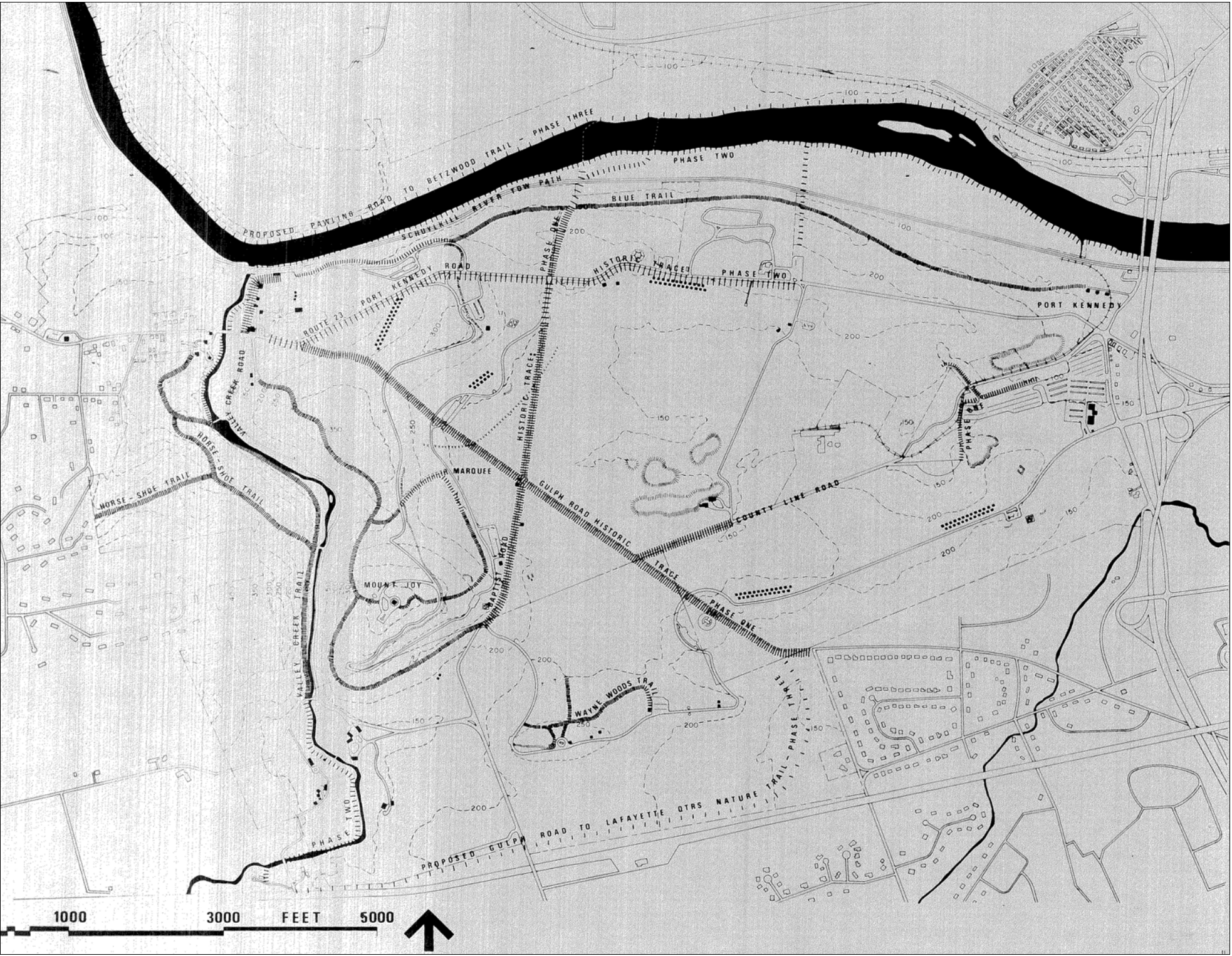


Figure 2.6. Plan showing proposal for trail network prior to bicentennial celebrations, 1964 (VAFO Archives).

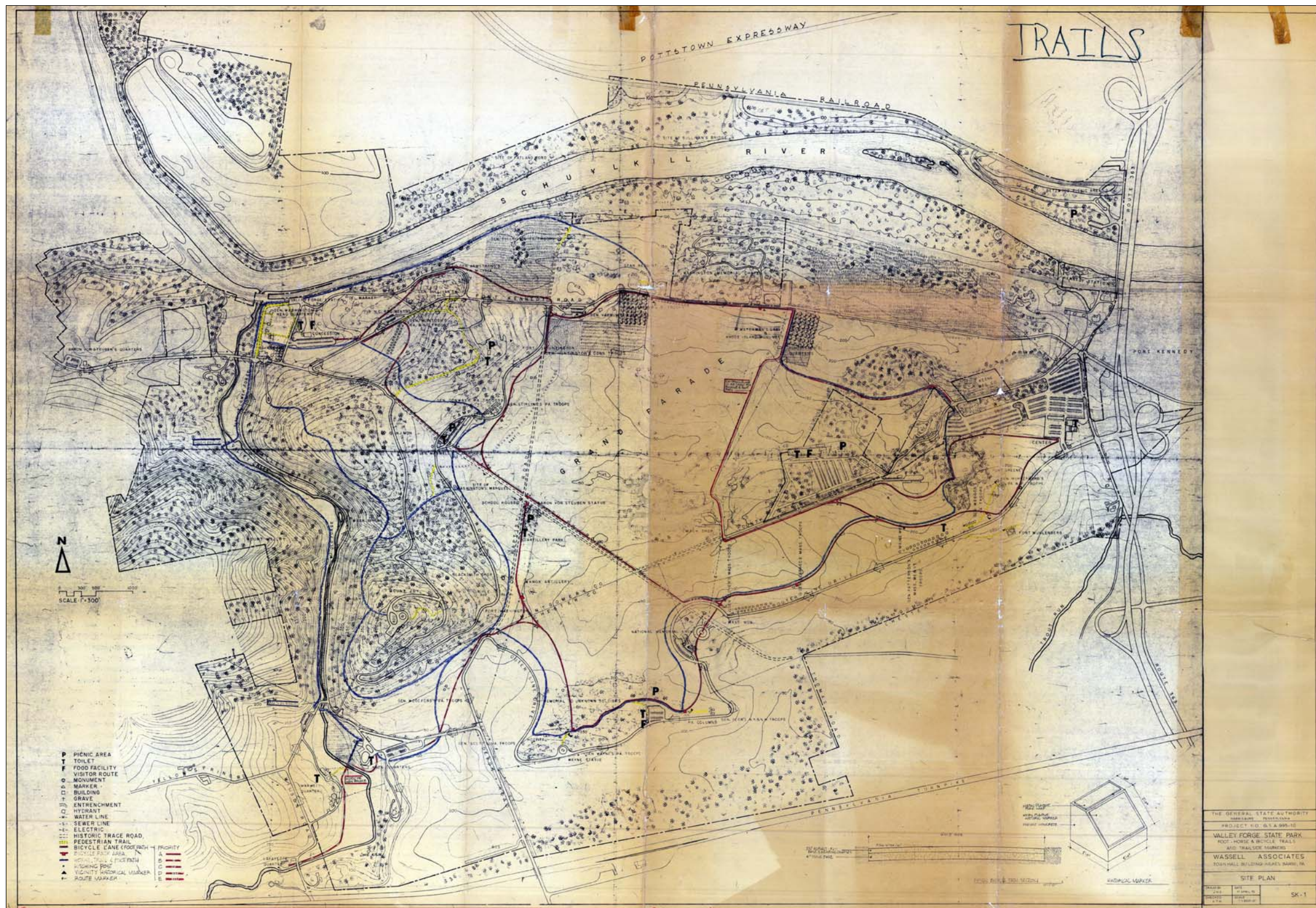


Figure 2.7. Plan showing *Construction of Foot - Horse and Bicycle Trails and Trailside Markers, Site Plan*, by Wassell Associates Architects, April 11, 1975 (VAFO Archives).

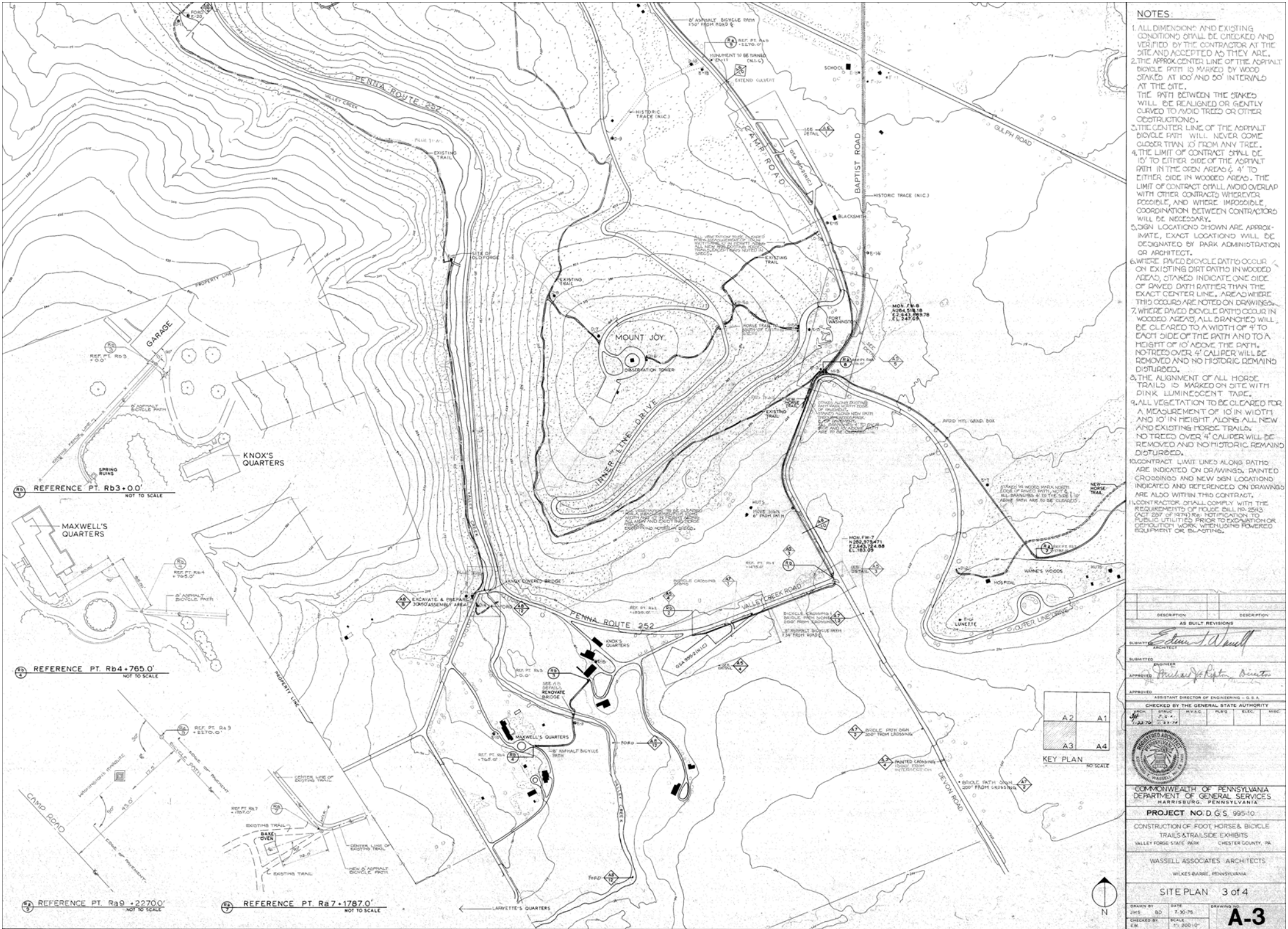


Figure 2.8. Plan showing Construction of Foot, Horse and bicycle trails and trailside exhibits, Site Plan 3 of 4, by Wassell Associates Architects, July 30, 1975 (VAFO Archives).

